DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 193 RC 018 775

AUTHOR Jones, Peter
TITLE The Remote Aboriginal Education Project.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 6p.; In: Cameron, Jim M. R., Ed.; Griffith, Dennis A., Ed. Education, Equity, and the Crisis in the Rural Community. Proceedings of the Rural Education Research Association Conference (Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia, February 1992); see RC 018 770.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; *Community Involvement; Educational Needs; Equal Education; Foreign Countries; Indigenous Populations; *Program Descriptions; Program Implementation; *Research Needs; *Rural Areas; Rural Education; *Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS *Aboriginal People; Australia (Northern Territory)

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need for research in relation to Aboriginal students in locations geographically distant from formal education services. The principles and policies of the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) have secured funding for Northern Territory Aboriginal education projects. These principles include: (1) the involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making; (2) equality of access to educational services; (3) increased Aboriginal participation in education; and (4) equitable and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal people. Examination of the participation, retention, and graduation rates of Aboriginal students from remote areas indicates a lack of educational equity. Significant interstate/territory developments coordinated by the Australian Education Council (AEC) has also demonstrated the need for research projects, especially at the secondary level. One proposed research project would examine a range of possible modes of secondary education delivery. The other proposal would seek to assist with documentation of an existing secondary education project in the Tanami Region of Central Australia. This report identifies possible resources to facilitate this research, locations where the research could take place, and possible funding sources. A collaborative effort is needed at the design and implementation stages, involving those affected by the research, i.e., Aboriginal people and the education systems that need the research findings for effective planning. (LP)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED348193

# The Remote Aboriginal Education Project

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Cameron
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

**Peter Jones,** *Northern Territory Department of Education*

The intention of this overview paper is to:

- outline some research needs as they apply to Aboriginal students in remote contexts;
- identify possible researchers and the resources to facilitate this research;
- list some locations where research could occur, and
- suggest a strategy for the implementation of remote area Aboriginal education research projects.

While this paper is titled The *Remote Aboriginal Education Project*, the use of the word 'remote' is not by choice of the author. Where Aboriginal people are living in their own home communities, it is probable that they would view the larger urban centres as being remote from them, not the other way around. There is a role for the term remote, in that it can refer to a separation between student and educational service provider, and it is in that sense that this paper views remoteness.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

## *Research Needs*

### *Why?*

It is indeed probably easier now, rather than at any earlier point in time, to argue the need for research in relation to Aboriginal students in remote contexts. The reason for this is the recent significant injection of Commonwealth funding into Aboriginal education through the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP), and the range of interstate collaborative curriculum projects being undertaken under the auspices of the Australian Education Council (AEC).

The Northern Territory Department of Education's 1990-1992 AEP Strategic and Operational Plans have attracted approximately $10.5 million for each year of the triennium into Northern Territory Aboriginal education projects. The Plans were prepared in response to the Commonwealth Government's AEP policy, which was based on four main principles:

- the involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making;
- equality of access to educational services;
- increased Aboriginal participation in education, and
- equitable and appropriate outcomes for Aboriginal people.

(Northern Territory AEP 1990-1992 Strategic Plan, p 2).

RC018775

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

These principles, which were framed by the *Hughes Report*, as they reflect the same concerns contained in the title of this conference, i.e. *Education, Equity and the Crisis in the Rural Community*. Any brief examination of the participation and retention, let alone the graduation rates of Aboriginal students from remote areas, will attest to the lack of educational equity and the continuing crisis facing the Aboriginal community, particularly in relation to equitable outcomes in secondary education. The *NT AEP 1990-1992 Strategic Plan*, stated that

> around 72 per cent of Aboriginals in the compulsory schooling age group are participating in schooling, compared with a national rate for all Australian children of almost 100 per cent

and

> only 20 per cent of Aboriginals aged 16 and 17 years are participating in schooling, compared with a national rate of almost 55 per cent for all Australian 16 to 17 year olds. (Northern Territory AEP 1990-1992 Strategic Plan, p 12).

With the availability of the AEP funding, it is timely for research projects which will provide the basis for adequate planning to ensure that the AEP principles listed above are appropriately addressed. While the opportunity has been missed for the 1990-1992 triennium, results from research projects should be most useful in assisting with planning for future trienniums.

There are also significant interstate/territory developments which further highlight the need for research projects relating to Aboriginal students in locations geographically distant from formal education services. In particular, the existence of two Australian Education Council (AEC) working parties addressing the delivery of educational services in remote contexts is important.

One of these groups is the *Working Party on a National Open Access Curriculum Framework for National Telecommunications Delivery*, which is developing a framework for the delivery of educational and training programs in schools, TAFE, higher education and industry sectors. This framework will complement other AEC national collaborative curriculum projects between participating state/territory systems.

The other AEC group is the *Working Party on the Provision of Access to Education in Remote Areas for Aboriginal Students*. This group is developing five related projects which will provide support for:

- Aboriginal students in Homeland Centres where no schooling facility exists;
- remote area parents or community members who act as student tutors;
- students studying at secondary level using distance education techniques;
- teachers in small isolated schools, and
- primary age students using School of the Air programs.

While these and other projects have been established in response to an obvious need, the question of a community negotiated, well documented and statistically validated research base

for educational projects involving Aboriginal people is yet to be clarified, let alone answered. Clearly if projects of national importance, like those I have referred to are to achieve their greatest effectiveness, the need for educational research should be apparent. In accordance with the first AEP principle, the involvement of Aboriginal people is central to the design and implementation of research projects affecting Aboriginal people. National policy and operational initiatives should be supported by a solid research base. This base should begin with the involvement of Aboriginal people in the design stage, and include Aboriginal community opinion supported by statistical data.

*What*

Having addressed the reasons for the need for educational research, it is also important to consider which areas require research activity. While a conference such as this could justifiably identify broad needs of Aboriginal students in remote locations ranging from preschool to tertiary education, the area of provision of access to secondary level education is probably the most significant. The *NT AEP 1990-1992 Strategic Plan* stated that,

> Aboriginal school participation rates fall away from ages 12 and 13 years, i.e. in the transition from primary to secondary, and fall markedly after the age of 14 years (Northern Territory AEP 1990-1992 Strategic Plan, p 12).

***Resources Needed - projects and researchers***

*Projects*

To take the need for the provision of secondary level education further, two possible research projects are suggested. One is a project to examine a range of possible modes of delivery of secondary education, the other would seek to assist with documentation of an existing secondary education project.

At present the Northern Territory Education Department has access to information on Aboriginal primary-age students through the Primary Assessment Program (PAP). This Program currently assesses students in English and Maths at a Year five and seven academic level. A significant proportion of these students who are capable of secondary studies, continue their education into the secondary years through study in their local community. A research proposal could be developed focusing upon students with demonstrated academic ability, to establish the secondary level needs of these students, in particular the most appropriate mode/s of delivery to meet their needs. By conducting this research on a Territory wide basis, the needs of students in a range of contexts, i.e. the Top-End, Central Australia, Homeland Centre communities, urban isolated, pastoral properties, etc, could be determined.

The other proposal is related to an initiative which is being developed in the Tanami Region of Central Australia. Through the use of compressed video, satellite telephones and radio/ telephone technology, a new approach to the provision of secondary education has been planned. So far, trials and workshops have been held to establish the viability of the the technology being used. Further trials involving the use of these technologies for educational purposes are planned during 1992 with Aboriginal secondary students.

The Tanami communications project is a major development because it addresses the areas of remote Aboriginal students studying at a secondary level using distance education technologies. Given the importance of this innovation, and the development of other national projects in related areas, the education component of the Tanami communications project certainly warrants research to assist with the documentation of the project to create a community opinion data-base with accompanying statistical data.

*Researchers*

Concerning the modes of secondary delivery research suggestion, the work of this proposal could be undertaken by the Evaluation, Research and Assessment (ERA) Section of the Curriculum and Assessment Division of the Northern Territory Department of Education, in conjunction with some Aboriginal communities. The ERA section, (which has to approve any research activity undertaken within the Territory Education system), with support from the Department's Statistics/Demography Unit of the Information Management Branch and with cooperation from the Operations North and South Divisions, would have access to the information required to commence the research task. Once a statistical profile had been prepared to identify probable secondary level students, a number of Aboriginal communities could be selected with a view to conducting an indepth discussion with Aboriginal community members on the most appropriate delivery models for the provision of secondary education. This research task should also involve the Aboriginal Education Standing Committee of the Northern Territory Board of Studies.

The Tanami research proposal would need to be negotiated with the Tanami Communications Management Committee and other stakeholders. While a range of research approaches could be suggested, it is likely that they and the Aboriginal communities to be involved would request ethnographic, local community, action research types of research approaches to be used. Depending on the model agreed upon, there may be a role for an external facilitator/consultant to provide assistance in the development of the research model, the conduct and documentation of the research.

*Appropriate Locations*

The locations to be used would need to be defined by each of the research projects as appropriate. The secondary delivery modes proposal should not overlook the requirements of students throughout the Territory, i.e. from Galiwinku to Docker River, those resident in

Homeland Centre communities, students adjacent to or in urban centres, students on pastoral properties or associated with mining communities, etc.

***Strategy and Funding - consultation and dollars***

*Consultation*

The need for research projects to conduct adequate consultation during the research design phase of their proposal is important, but is particularly important in relation to research projects involving the Aboriginal community. The reason for this is simple enough, but is still often overlooked by non-Aboriginal researchers when research projects which affect Aboriginal people are being developed. It is now recognised that Aboriginal people have to be central participants in policies and programs which will affect them because without Aboriginal community involvement, there will be a lack of commitment and participation from Aboriginal people. If programs affecting Aboriginal people are to operate successfully, consultation and involvement should occur from the commencement of the programs design.

*Dollars*

Funding for the above projects could be obtained from a number of sources. In relation to the modes of secondary delivery research proposal, it could be a joint Northern Territory Education Department and Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) project. The Northern Territory Department could offer research expertise and operational staff to conduct the research, with DEET, possibly through the second triennium and AEP funding, providing financial support to facilitate the project.

The Tanami proposal could be resourced by contributions from the companies/agencies which have been involved in the development of the Tanami project to date, i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ASTIC), AUSSAT, GEC, Plessey Telecommunications, Imparja, Northern Territory Open College (NTOC) and Telecom. Certainly these bodies should be consulted should the proposal gain acceptance from the Aboriginal groups involved.

Other possible sources would be DEET or tertiary institutions with an interest in distance education technology usage.

*Summary*

In this overview paper it has been suggested that there is a considerable need for research into some areas relating to Aboriginal students in remote locations, particularly in the light of recent developments, i.e. AEP and AEC. It has been emphasised that in relation to Aboriginal communities, collaborative/ partnership/team efforts are needed at the design and implementation stages, involving those affected by the research i.e. Aboriginal people, and the systems which need the research findings for effective planning.